

SENTINEL SURVEILLANCE FOR INFLUENZA (THE FLU)- HOW TO GET STARTED

Alright, I'm interested. How do I get started?

Great! You can get started by talking to your [local health department](#) and asking for the flu coordinator. They'll collect some contact information and can answer any other questions you may have. They'll pass that information along to the state health department and public health lab (DCLS). DCLS will mail you two specimen collection kits. There are insulated cardboard boxes with viral transport media and swabs, specimen collection instructions, submission forms, and a mailing label.

What time of the year should I start collecting specimens?

The seasonal flu surveillance period lasts from early October through mid-May ([MMWR weeks 40 through 20](#)). For the 2019-20 flu season, the exact dates are September 29 through May 16. You can start collecting as soon as we pass the initial date!

What does specimen collection entail?

Specimens should be nasopharyngeal (NP) swabs collected from patients in your office who meet the influenza-like illness (ILI) criteria. For public health surveillance, ILI consists of a fever of at least 100°F with a sore throat and/or a cough. We know not all patients with ILI actually have influenza, especially at the beginning and end of the season. Specimens can be collected from anyone, not just those that have flu high on the differential.

How many specimens should I collect?

In order to have confidence that we could identify viruses that are either novel or resistant to antivirals, we ask that you collect two specimens per week at the beginning and end of the season and five specimens a week during the peak. What weeks are considered to be the 'peak' can be based on your own judgement, but we also recommend looking at the [Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report](#).

When should I be collecting specimens?

We ask that you collect specimens at the beginning of the week so that they can be mailed out by Wednesday. This allows for transit time and testing before the end of the week. Please keep in mind that DCLS should receive the specimens within 72 hours of collection. You can store them in a fridge until they are shipped.

How can I see the results?

DCLS will mail individual results back to you. VDH, at the state level will also put together a report that includes the results from all of the specimens you've submitted so that you can see how the flu season is unfolding in your area.

**If you have any other questions, please let
your local flu coordinator know!
Thank you!**

